

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9633

INFO USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 0409

USIA FOR IEU (SADLIK)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR CSCE CZ

SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS' VISAS

1. EHT EMBASSY CAN APPRECIATE THE DISCUSSION THAT MUST BE TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT AND USIA CONCERNING VOA TRAVELERS IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES AS FROM USIA WITHOUT USING THE VOA TAG. WE ARE NOT INFORMED AS TO WHETHER THE GOC SPOKESMAN WAS CORRECT (PRAGUE 308) WHEN HE SAID THIS FORMULA HAD BEEN USED BEFORE. IT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT FOR THIS EMBASSY TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION, AND OUR VIEWS WERE STATED IN PARAGRAPH 5 OF PRAGUE 308.

2. THIS MESSAGE IS MEANT TO REINFORCE THAT ARGUMENT. WE BELIEVE THE ISSUE OF VISAS FOR JOURNALISTS CUTS VERY DEEPLY IN THIS COUNTRY. ON THE PRO OR LIBERALIZATION SIDE, IS THE CSCE COMMITMENT; ON THE ANTI OR CONSERVATIVE SIDE, IS THE FACT THAT 1968 IS STILL A RUNNING SORE AND THE REGIME HAS SERIOUS FEARS (PROBABLY UNJUSTIFIED, IN OUR OPINION) THAT CONTINUED VENTILATION OF "THE CZECHOSLOVAK QUESTION" MAY UNDERMINE STABILITY OR AT LEAST EMBARRASS THE LEADERSHIP PROFOUNDLY AND THUS LEAD TO POLITICAL PROBLEMS. AS IN MANY OTHER AREAS, THOSE ARGUING FOR A MORE LIBERAL APPROACH ARE STICKING THEIR NECKS OUT.

3. CHARGE HAS HAD A NUMBER OF CONVERSATIONS WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SPACIL ON THIS SUBJECT (NOT TO MENTION OTHER

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OFFICIALS), AND BELIEVES SPACIL IS SIGNALLING THAT THE MFA SIMPLY

CANNOT GO AS FAR AS WE WANT THEM TO GO ON VISAS FOR VOA PEOPLE. ZANTOVSKY (HEAD 6TH DEPT) MADE IT EXPLICIT THAT MFA WAS TRYING TO SET VOA CLEARLY OFF FROM RFE, FOR THE OPPOSITION TO RFE WAS GOING TO CONTINUE. WE BELIEVE THE SAME HARDLINERS WHO ARE INSPIRING THE BAD PRESS TREATMENT OF THE U.S. ARE ALSO FIGHTING AGAINST RFE AND AGAINST VOA VISAS. THE MFA IS, WILLY-NILLY, OUR ONLY ALLY IN THIS MATTER IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. IN THE VISA CASE, WE ARE TRYING TO GIVE THEM AMMUNITION BY DENYING CTK MAN TILL A VISA. IN THE BAD PRESS MATTER, WE HAVE NOT HAD MUCH AMMUNITION TO GIVE THEM, BUT BELIEVE THAT NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS (ESPECIALLY STEPS FORWARD IN THE GOLD-CLAIMS AREA) WILL PROVIDE THIS AMMUNITION IN THE NEAR TERM. WE ARE NOT ENCOUNTERING CLOSED MINDS AMONG OUR MFA INTERLOCUTERS; WE ARE GETTING SIGNALS THAT THEY ARE BOXED IN ON AN IDEOLOGICAL ISSUE AND CAN ONLY MOVE A FEW INCHES AT A TIME. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE CONFRONTATION AND A HARD-AND-FAST DRAWING OF LINES ON EITHER FRONT (VISAS OR BAD PRESS) IS IN OUR OWN LONG-TERM INTEREST. WE HAVE HOPES THINGS WILL KEEP WORKING OUT VERY SLOWLY IF WE DO NOT DRAW HARD-AND-FAST LINES.

4. ON THE VISA MATTER, AS WE SAID IN PRAGUE 308, WE THINK THE GOC CAME A CONSIDERABLE WAY TO MEET OUR POINTS. HOWEVER, WE CONSIDER SEEGER'S VISA (AND VISAS FOR FUTURE U.S. VISITING JOURNALISTS PART OF THE DEAL, AND WOULD WANT TO SEE IT ISSUED AT THE SAME TIME TILL'S IS. IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, WE RECOMMEND STRONGLY THAT THE DEAL BE ACCEPTED, AND THAT WE BE INSTRUCTED FORTHWITH TO ISSUE TILL'S VISA AS SOON AS WE ARE ASSURED SEEGER'S WILL ALSO BE ISSUED.  
PERRY

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